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## Max Weber and the Complexity of Parliamentary Democracy: Applying Formal and Substantive Rationality to the English and Welsh Education Policy-making Process

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**Abstract:** This article illustrates the importance of Max Weber's attitude to both bureaucratic and political functions. Formal and substantive rational concepts are applied to distinguish the actions of education civil servants and politicians in relation to education policy-making. Evidence is taken from English and Welsh Educational and Public Administration Parliamentary Select Committees of the 1970s and the present day. We gain from Weber's ideas a relevant framework to critique the relationship and significantly the historical and contemporary roles of education civil servants and politicians. The article demonstrates that a change has occurred with more substantive inputs visible within both the education relationship and general policy-making processes. The article further argues that Parliamentary Select Committees are crucial in questioning both formal and substantive influences within parliamentary democracy.

*"We are concerned ... Mr Normington, that sometimes we think you, as a Department, take us a bit for granted; and one of the ambitions for us, as a Select Committee, was to get your radar, we actually wanted you to be conscious, when you talked to the Secretary of State, when you made decisions, or made mistakes, or whichever, that there is a Select Committee, that wants to have, yes, a healthy rela-*

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*tionship with you ... we want you to be aware that we exist ... you see us as a kind of peripheral irritant, rather than anything meaningful in your life.*" [Chairman of the Education Select Committee. Mr. Barry Sheerman, MP talking to David Normington, Permanent Secretary of State for Education, HoC, 2002d:87].

## Weber and the rationalization of modern bureaucracy

Weber's ideas concerning bureaucracy highlight the danger of an expanding modern state and the power civil servants exercise through rational administration. This was summed up by Weber's concept of the "rationalization of the world", whose success would be attributed to bureaucracy as the primary mechanism of its achievement. 'Rationalization of the world' leads to efficiency, influence and control of the social environment. When creating his theories of bureaucracy, Weber was interested in the design and function of modern administration. His inspiration derived from his family background and the economic position and development of the modern German state. As Collins (1986) suggests, the fact that Weber's father was a politician in the German Reichstag exposed the young Weber to his father's colleagues and political environment. Industrialism throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Germany was shaping a new German economy and the growth of capitalism threatened a change in the nature of the German State. A new industrial middle class was challenging the economic hegemony of the rural, Prussian landlord. Classical liberal values were being challenged by greater state intervention to cope with industrial, urban expansion (Mommensen, 1977; Scaff, 1984). Weber was highlighting the movement from traditional to modern forms of bureaucratic authority within German society.

Within his historical and sociological analysis of bureaucracy, Weber was interested in the processes of formal rationality within the modern state. What this meant was that processes of rationality were increasing during the modern period and the state was having more influence in society through bureaucratic means. Weber argued senior bureaucrats have loyalties to their departments and administering policies, as well as to their political counterparts in the central state, although the impersonal, impartial nature of the relationship had caused problems within the German State.<sup>1</sup> Strict objectivity can be witnessed

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<sup>1</sup> For British perspectives on questioning the role of the Whitehall bureaucratic see: Barberis, P. (Ed.) (1996) *The Whitehall Reader. The UK's administrative machine in action*, Buckingham, Open University Press; Chapman, R. A. (1984) *Leadership in the British Civil Service*, London, Croom Helm; Dowding, K. (1995) *The Civil Service*, London, Routledge; Fry, G.K. (1985) *The Changing Civil Service*, London, George Allen & Unwin; Headey, B.

within modern bureaucratic management that influences how written documents are controlled or 'filed'. This raises the issue of control of documentation and what information bureaus give.

Although Weber (1968, 1992) did not define the term bureaucracy, it is significant that he focuses on the basic features common to large-scale administration. But within this context, Weber (1968:979) acknowledges that, '... within bureaucracy i.e. all state activities that fall outside the field of law creation and court procedure, one has been accustomed to claims for the freedom and the paramountcy of individual circumstances.' Weber here points toward independent economic and political interests that can function outside state influence and intervention. He (ibid.) argues that bureaucracy has its own power to consider within the state and suggests, '... it is always these interests which tip the balance.' Weber (1968, 1992) himself was forthright with his praise for the German civil service and the power position they held, but was aware within his writings of the danger of, '... a closed status group of officials' and '[the] minimization of the authority of officialdom.' This was highlighted in his metaphor of the 'iron cage of bureaucracy.' The dangers for Weber were a closed status group of state bureaucrats and the maximization of bureaucratic authority. Weber<sup>2</sup> wanted German politicians to create and influence policy within the state, not civil servants within the German bureaucratic machine. He was concerned with the increasing ability of bureaucracy to accumulate power and authority within the formal rational framework of hierarchy, continuity, impersonality and expertise. The nature of the state, for Weber, should involve limited state interference concerning the individual. However, Weber wanted greater political involvement within the policy-making process. He believed rational bureaucrats had too great an influence on policy-making.

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(1974) *British Cabinet Ministers. The Roles of Politicians in Executive Office*, London, George Allen & Unwin; Hennessy, P. (1989) *Whitehall*, New York, The Free Press; Hennessy, P. (1996) *Muddling Through. Power, Politics and the Quality of Government in Postwar Britain*, London, Victor Gollancz; Stanworth, P. Giddens, A (Eds.) (1974) *Elites and Power in British Society*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press; Theakston, K. (1996) 'The Heath Government, Whitehall and the Civil Service' in Ball, S., Seldon, A. (Eds.) *The Heath Government: a reappraisal*, London, Longman, pp 75-106; Young, H. (1993) *One of Us*, London, Pan Books. For international insights into the role and function of the civil servant see: Begley, P. T., Leonard, P. E. (Eds.) *The Values of Educational Administration*, London, The Falmer Press; Derlien H-U. (1999) 'On the Selective Interpretation of Max Weber's Concept of Bureaucracy in Organization Theory and Administrative Science' in Ahonen, P., Palonen, K. (Eds.) *Dis-Embalming Max Weber*, Jyväskylä, University of Jyväskylä; Evers, C. Chapman, J. (Eds.) (1995) *Educational Administration. An Australian Perspective*, St. Leonards, Allen and Unwin; Granastein, J. L. (1998) *The Ottawa Men. The Civil Service Mandarins, 1935-1957*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press.

<sup>2</sup> Weber (1968:1381) states with regard to *Parliament in a Reconstructed Germany*, 'This political treatise is a revision and enlargement of articles published in the *Franfurter Zeitung* during the summer of 1917.'

## Formal and Substantive Rationality

Weber (1968) distinguishes between formal rationality which highlights the means of achieving efficiency and substantive rationality which considers ends themselves that are functionally rational but lead to substantially irrational ends. Formal rationality imposes order on the world through a system of measurement and calculable ability. Substantive rationality relies on values and subjective action. Clegg (1994) and Wallerstein (2000) highlight the importance of substantive rationality and underline Weber's argument that political actions cannot be measured in terms of formal calculation. Permanent civil servants have advantages over their elected parliamentary counterparts. As Weber (1968:225) argues, 'Bureaucratic administration means fundamentally domination through knowledge ... bureaucratic organisations, or the holders of power who make use of them, have the tendency to increase their power still further by the knowledge growing out of the experience of service.'

Weber's theories and writings acknowledge that bureaucracy through its modern functions, its accumulated knowledge and expertise over time, must have some influence over the policy-making process within the central state. According to Weber's position, bureaucracy is a form of organisation superior to all others and further bureaucratization and rationalization is an escapable fact. With regard to the central state relationship, something had to be done to counter this influence. Weber suggests that substantive rationality should be employed to counter formal rationality within the central state. Bureaucratic functions, in the 1970s and today, are still being carried out by education bureaucrats in Whitehall. If bureaucratic functions are influencing policy-making procedure, then Weber's writings I would suggest allow a critique of the role and influence of bureaucrats within the central state during both education administrations at the Department of Education and Science (DES) and Department of Education and Skills (DfES) respectively.

Weber (1968, 1992) was interested in how politicians could keep their individual freedoms from greater bureaucratic control. He argues that both the elected politician and the permanent bureaucrat should exercise responsibility and power within the central state. However, individual freedom should allow politicians to carry out their role as policy-makers without bureaucratic intervention. Weber's ideas were thus a combination of German Liberalism and Nationalism that feared an increase in bureaucratic rationalisation which would hinder the self-responsible nature of the individual (Mommson, 1965, 1974, 1977). Weber wanted more political involvement in the policy-making process. He used Bismarck as an example of political leadership although this in itself had caused problems for the German State<sup>3</sup>. Giddens (1972) highlights the

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<sup>3</sup> For more on the influence of Bismarck on political leadership see: Diggins, J. P. (1996) *Max Weber. Politics and the Spirit of Tragedy*, New York, Basic Books; Eliaeson, S.

problem of political development, or this source of tension between democracy and bureaucracy, as the 'legacy' of Bismarck, who had left a strong bureaucracy with no means of allowing independent political leadership to flourish. Bismarck left what Mommsen (1984:164) describes as 'conservative creature bureaucrats' in the state. The processes within modernity and industrialism had changed the nature of the central state. Weber feared the iron cage of bureaucracy would obliterate individualism and political freedom. The iron cage was a condition of modernity (Weber, 1992; Clegg, 1990) and underlines Weber's pessimistic vision of increased rationality. Weber argues that civil servants question political policies and ideas that might not be in the interest of state departments. However, this as far as civil servant influence in the policy-making process should go. Duty, for the bureaucrat, stands above personal preference. An issue for Weber therefore concerned what parliament and politicians could accomplish to counter bureaucratic knowledge, rational authority and civil service influence within the central state relationship. For Weber, (1968:1408-1411) parliament had to control the selection of administrative heads, as well as becoming accountable through committees and most significantly, controlling the administration along the guidelines accepted by Parliament. Weber wanted people with political instincts to come forward with the motive of political power who would be capable of being politically responsible. He argued that Parliament was hardly the right environment to attract the individuals who could form and shape policy-making within the political system. The material rewards for capable and ambitious individuals lay outside Parliament. However for those who wanted political power, the task within Parliament was clear. Politicians had to become the countervailing force against bureaucratic domination within the German State. In relation to politics and substantive rationality, the British Parliamentary Committee, for Weber (1968:1419-1421) was an example of a possible breeding ground for future capable politicians: 'The continuous supervision which would be introduced by the seemingly unspectacular right of parliamentary inquiry is the basic precondition for all further reforms aiming at an increase of parliament's share in government.' Weber (ibid.) continues, 'Only such co-operation between civil servants and politicians can guarantee the continuous supervision of the administration and with it the political education of leaders and led.' The question that Held et al (1984:37) raise is surely one that Weber considered: 'How can bureaucratic power be checked?' We can see from Weber's (1968, 1992) work that substantive rationality, expressed within a strong Parliament was required to check bureaucratic rational legal authority and formal influence.

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(1998) 'Max Weber and Plebiscitary Democracy' in Schroeder, R. (Ed.) *Max Weber, Democracy and Modernization*, London, Macmillan, pp. 47-60; Krasnodebski, Z. (1998) 'Back to *Mittleuropa*? Weber, Germany, and Contemporary Central Europe' in Schroeder, R. (Ed.) *Max Weber, Democracy and Modernization*, London, Macmillan, pp. 129-144.

## Bureaucratic and political understandings of education policy-making, 1970-1974

Civil servants William Pile<sup>4</sup> (1974, 1979) and Toby Weaver<sup>5</sup> (1973, 1979) have provided personal insights into the function of the DES within the policy-making process. Margaret Thatcher<sup>6</sup> (1968, 1995) has also offered her opinions on her interaction, as a politician, with her civil servants at the DES. Pile (HoC, 1976:11), in his evidence to the Parliamentary Expenditure Committee Report, maintained that education policy is about, '... objectives, priorities and decisions ... which are settled by ministers and not by civil servants ... many of these objectives and priorities are settled politically, for example, in manifestos, before an administration comes into office ... the job of civil servants is to serve the government and ministers of the day.' In other words, Pile believed that education bureaucrats serve politicians and that civil servants administer rather than influence or determine in any way education policy. Pile (1979:4) further stated that '... the DES shapes the environment which shapes policies, procedures and personalities of the DES. The words control and direction convey an impression of omnipotence which has never corresponded with reality.' Pile's understanding of the role of civil servants and the definition of policy-making differs from Weaver's; so did his understanding of the role of the DES in policy-making and implementation. This is evidenced by the terminology Weaver (1979: 7-9) used: 'Control is concerned with the conferment and exercise of powers (what may be done) as with the imposition and fulfillment of duties (what must be done) ... Every control embodies a policy; every policy exemplifies a control.' For him, control was the element that best represented the function of the DES. The level of control education bureaucrats had in the DES with regard to policy-making was important. Policy, for Weaver (1979:43) established '... the content of educational control. It defines or describes guidelines for the pursuit of the course of action desired.' On the contrary, policy for Pile shaped rather than controlled the educational environment.

Thatcher also maintained that she had a list of policies in June 1970 when she arrived at the DES.<sup>7</sup> Then, she had been 'welcomed' by outgoing perma-

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<sup>4</sup> William Pile was Permanent Secretary of State for Education at the DES, 1970-1976.

<sup>5</sup> Toby Weaver was Deputy Secretary of State for Education at the DES, 1962-1973.

<sup>6</sup> Margaret Thatcher was Secretary of State for Education at the DES, 1970-1974.

<sup>7</sup> With the Conservative Party's General Election victory in 1970, Prime Minister, Edward Heath preserved Margaret Thatcher's portfolio, as she went from Shadow to Secretary of State for Education. The Conservative Party Archive, situated at the Bodleian Library, Oxford University, provides a resource into how Conservative education policy was discussed, made and ultimately published in the 1970 party manifesto. An education advisory committee on policy (ACP (68) 52) was chaired by William van Straubenzee, who later became Joint Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Education at the DES, 1970-1972. Steering Committees (third draft, SC/68/11, fourth draft, SC/7012) followed the advisory committee. Within the advisory committee, importance is placed on the secondary sector of education,

nent secretary, Sir Herbert Andrew and incoming Permanent Secretary, William Pile. As she (1995:165) herself has stated: 'It was all too easy to slip once more into the warm water of civil service respect for 'the minister'.' Yet, Young and Sloman (1986) demonstrated that from the start there was an abrasive but lively relationship between Pile and Thatcher in 1970. Pile (in Young and Sloman, 1986:23) reflected on it: 'Within the first ten minutes of her arrival she uncovered two things to us; one is, I think what I would call an innate wariness of the civil service, quite possibly even a distrust and secondly a page from an exercise book with eighteen things she wanted done that day ... she thought the civil service would oppose.' It is interesting to note both Pile's opinion of Thatcher's 'innate wariness' of the civil service as well as the belief of the Secretary of State that bureaucrats 'would oppose political policies'. With regard to Circular 10/70<sup>8</sup>, Thatcher (1995:168) voiced her opinion that political interests could clash with bureaucratic values: 'My civil servants made no secret of the fact that they considered that a Circular should contain a good deal of material setting out the department's views on its preferred shape for secondary education in the country as a whole. This might take for ever, and in any event I did not see things that way.' The 'departments views' actually clashed with Thatcher's political views regarding the content of the Circular and her insistence that the policy document tried to preserve as many grammar and direct-aided schools as possible in 1970.

Pile agreed that ultimately, ministers decided on policies that are introduced. However, if as Weaver had suggested, the DES is essentially a policy-making body, can politicians be effective and create education policy? Weaver gave the impression that the influence of the education bureaucrat far outweighed the administrative role of the civil servant. If this is the case, how far should the policy functions of the DES be allowed to influence education policy-making? Arguably, the answers to both questions are positive. This is highlighted in previous education policy documentation e.g. Circulars 10/65 and 10/66 concerning secondary reorganization policies that requested that all local education

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preserving direct and grant aided school status (ACP: recommendation 15, paragraph 41) and a call for postgraduate student grants to be replaced by loans, (ACP: recommendation 39, paragraph 86) a measure introduced almost thirty years after the discussions of the advisory committee. These examples highlight both the immediate and incremental nature of different substantive education policy recommendations.

<sup>8</sup> Circular 10/70 asked local education authorities to 'reconsider' or 'modify' existing secondary school comprehensive reorganisation schemes. It involved no consultation with local education authorities, teacher unions and limited discussion with DES civil servants. Its nature and speed of introduction is unique. It took only eight days to introduce, in comparison with over a year for the introduction of Circular 10/65. See: Gordon, P., Aldrich, R., Dean, D. (1991) *Education and Policy in England in the Twentieth Century*, London, The Woburn Press; Kogan, M. (1978) *The Politics of Educational Change*, Manchester, Manchester University Press; Lawrence, I. (1992) *Power and Politics at the Department of Education and Science*, London, Cassell; Ribbins, P., Sherratt, B. (1997) *Radical Educational Policies and Conservative Secretaries of State*, London, Cassell.



authorities (LEAs) submitted proposals to the DES for comprehensive reorganisation.<sup>9</sup> Pile (1979:36) explained: ‘... it is an officials’ business to advise their ministers on policy.’ As Weaver (1979:58) elaborated: ‘Ministers ultimately make policy while officials apply policy. In exercising his prerogative of determining policy he is performing a political function. The Secretary of State is concerned with conflicts of interest, public relations, calculation of risks, distribution of power and judgements of value.’ It is clearly the ministers’ responsibility to make the important policy decisions, but it is also clear that civil servants have varying degrees of influence on the education policy-making process, especially if the minister is incapable of being responsible due to inexperience or mis-understanding of the policy-making process.

Although Weaver admitted that policies are adopted through political channels, he also mentioned the economic restrictions involved in education administration. The power of the purse can be seen within the external factors affecting policy-making, for example, the economic situation in the late 1960s and early 1970s and the freezing of educational expenditure in 1968 (DES,1969). Ultimately, Weaver (1973:3) argued the education system was heavily conditioned by central political and bureaucratic experience and explained the historical process of education policy from his own career: ‘... as a civil servant I have learnt that, by what I can see now as a historical process, each in turn of the many Ministers I have served has done much to create the circumstances ... in which successors’ have been forced to act.’ Ministers thus face a policy legacy from the previous political administration, but more significantly they also face a departmental policy which is grounded in specialised, technical, bureaucratic knowledge and expertise (Kellner and Crowther-Hunt, 1981). The civil servant can therefore have differing degrees of influence on education policy. As this section has highlighted, different degrees of influence depend on the permanent status of the civil servant and the knowledge gained over time compared to the elected and more inexperienced politician.

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<sup>9</sup> For an insight into the literature on comprehensive reorganisation, see: Benn, C., Chitty, C. (1997) *Thirty Years On. Is Comprehensive Education Alive and Well or Struggling to Survive?* London, Penguin; Edwards, T., Whitty, G., Power, S. (1999) ‘Moving Back from Comprehensive Education?’ in Demaine, J. (Ed.) *Education Policy and Contemporary Politics*, London, Macmillan, pp. 30-43; Kogan, M. (1971) *The Politics of Education*, Harmondsworth, Penguin; Lowe, R. (1997) *Schooling and Social Change, 1964-1990*, London, Routledge; McCulloch, G. (2002) ‘Secondary Education’ in Aldrich, R. (Ed.) *A Century of Education*, London, RoutledgeFalmer, pp. 31-53; Simon, B. (1991) *Education and the Social Order. British Education since 1944*, London, Lawrence and Wishart.

## Contemporary examples of the interaction between civil servants and politicians<sup>10</sup>

There is little question that the general, as well as the education relationship between civil servants and politicians is markedly different now compared to what it was thirty years ago. As David Normington (HoC, 2002d:6) informs the Education Select Committee, the lines separating Ministers and bureaucrats have blurred, due to more substantive inputs into the education policy-making process from politicians and policy advisers. Normington (ibid.) justifies this increase of input through consultation with Education Minister, Estelle Morris, in relation to the implementation of policy. Issues are discussed and the Permanent Secretary of State will 'go away and try and put it right'. This confession is relevant, as the thoughts of William Pile or Toby Weaver (HoC, 1976) coming out with a comment similar to Normington seems to be slim. The issue of political advisers is not new, in fact Ted Heath's government witnessed a sharp rise in the number of political appointees<sup>11</sup>, but the recent substantial increase in numbers did have substantive consequences for parliamentary democracy. Technically, political advisers appointed by Ministers to work on policy creation today have to abide by civil servant rules within Ministries. They have the unofficial role of temporary civil servants. Andrew Turnbull (HoC, 2002f:27) argues that these appointees either 'sink or swim' but interestingly, 'very little effort is made to train them, look at their performance [and] to get them to understand what their responsibilities are'. The most topical example of a clash

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<sup>10</sup> Within the Department for Education and Skills: (DfES) Estelle Morris is Secretary of State for Education and Skills; Stephen Twigg is Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Young People; David Milliband is Minister of State for School Standards; and, David Normington is Permanent Secretary of State for Education. Within the Cabinet Office, Andrew Turnbull replaced Richard Wilson as Permanent Secretary of State for the Civil Service in September 2002. David Puttnam was the first Chairperson of the General Teaching Council and resigned from his post in June 2002. Estelle Morris resigned as Secretary of State for Education and Skills in October 2002 and was replaced by Charles Clarke.

<sup>11</sup> Within the DES, the Department Planning Organisation (DPO) was created in 1971, alongside the Public Expenditure Survey Committee (PESC) and the Central Policy Review Staff (CPRS). The CPRS was essentially a substantive 'think tank', the equivalent of a contemporary Quango and was designed to influence policy-making within the DPO. However, the DPO came up with recommendations which were published in the 1972 Education White Paper, *Education: A framework for Expansion* (DES, 1972). The White Paper took 18 months to create and covered 3/4s of education expenditure. If you compare the creation time with Circular 10/70, understanding is increased in relation to the nature and role of politicians and civil servants in policy-making. Historically, politicians had more substantive influence on smaller policy documents (Circular 10/70) while civil servants had more input (through PESC) in larger policy documentation (*Education: A Framework for Expansion*). See: Ball, S[teven] J. (1990) *Politics and Policy Making in Education. Explorations in Policy Sociology*. London, Routledge; Theakston, K. (1996) 'The Heath Government, Whitehall and the Civil Service' in Ball, S[tuart], Seldon, A. (Eds. ) *The Heath Government, 1970-1974, A Reappraisal*, London, Longman.

between civil servant and political adviser was that of Martin Sixsmith and Jo Moore over the 'burying of bad news' on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, which eventually led to both Sixsmith and Moore resigning their positions, as well as the Minister for Transport, Stephen Byers. Perhaps a more overt example of the importance and role of the political adviser is raised by Richard Wilson (2002a:359) who states in the Public Administration Select Committee that '... half of the special advisers employed in the Cabinet Office are in press work.' Wilson's comment suggests the role of news management is continuing to change the face of parliamentary democracy. The nature of the state today involves greater press manipulation, as well as bureaucratic clashes with political advisers which highlights more substantive inputs into both politics and government.

The Chairman of the Education Select Committee, Barry Sheerman, MP, raises the issue of civil servant (or lack of) involvement in the creation of General Teaching Council (GTC)<sup>12</sup>. Both Education Ministers and Permanent Secretary of State are asked to respond to civil servant inaction concerning the implementation of legislation. David Miliband and Stephen Twigg are cross-examined over this event. Twigg (2002g:729) calls his civil servants 'dedicated and enthusiastic ... people' and capable of producing quality management. However, the Select Committee are concerned about this episode as they had listened to the first President of the GTC, Lord David Puttnam, (HoC, 2002b) who was scathing in his criticism of the civil service for their indifference to the GTC's creation. Significantly both Miliband and Twigg's predecessors in the Department for Education and Skills were 're-shuffled' just after Puttnam left his position.<sup>13</sup> Healy and Timms are not in a position to respond to Puttnam's arguments because they are no longer within the DfES. It is the continuing case that the major importance of the Select Committee is to raise these issues in front of both politicians and civil servants. Normington (HoC, 2002d:111-114) defends the DfES under cross-examination, although he admits to 'a mistake in the drafting of the legislation' but no mistake 'through lack of [civil servant] commitment. Consequently, the GTC has not had the best of beginnings and is still building its reputation within education and amongst teachers who are legally required to join the organisation. This it

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<sup>12</sup> The General Teaching Council (GTC) is an independent professional body for the teaching profession in England. It came into being in 2000 and has two functions: i. Advise government on education policy; ii. Reflect the professional views of teachers and maintain high professional standards that already exist. The GTC has a 64-member council, 44 of whom are practising teachers. However, the Minister of State for Education appoints some members which highlights its substantive nature. See Race (2002) 'Teacher Professionalism or De-Professionalization? The consequences of school based management on domestic and international contexts.' *British Education Research Association Journal*, Vol 28, 3, pp. 459-464.

<sup>13</sup> Miliband and Twigg's predecessors were: John Healey MP, Public Under Secretary of State for Adult Skills; and, Steven Timms MP, Minister of State for School Standards.

seems, from the evidence, is an example of continued rational legal authority within the central state.

One of the advantages of the Select Committee is that it provides politicians with a check and balance system in relation to their civil servants. Normington (HoC, 2002d:66) is reminded that civil servants names and telephone numbers have been removed from the DfES annual report. In agreeing to include these point of contact details for the general public, Normington (HoC, 2002d:67) replies that 'nobody reads the Departmental Report'. In response, Select Committee member, Mr. John Baron MP, says. 'We do.' This comment highlights a Weberian interpretation of what the DfES select committee entails. It is a parliamentary substantive check on the role and influence of central civil servant implementation of education policy. Andrew Turnbull (HoC, 2002f:99) has to deflect criticism from the Public Administration Select Committee concerning bureaucrats falling out with one another over turf wars relating to Departmental policies. Turnbull's job as he sees it is to prevent disagreements amongst bureaucrats. This is becoming increasingly difficult, as Turnbull's predecessor, Richard Wilson (HoC, 2002a:366) argues, '... the Civil Service is engaged or probably engaged on the most radical programme of reform of any civil service in the western world'. This concerns not only the future nature of bureaucracy, which will be codified in a new Civil Service Act, whose White Paper is due towards the end of 2002, but also the characteristics the modern civil service was built upon e.g. recruitment; efficiency; hierarchy; and, permanency. The disenchantment of Andrew Turnbull (HoC, 2002f:365) is highlighted when he mentions that civil servants no longer have a permanent job for life and have to quite literally 'fight for their jobs' against external rather than internal candidates. The contemporary relationship between civil servants and politicians in the central state has more political input, a change has occurred using Weberian terminology from formal to substantive authority. There has also been a revolutionary change in the nature of policy-making within the state with the use of media techniques as well as the increase of political advisers. Parliamentary Committees remain both 'peripheral irritants' and an important future check, not only to balance bureaucratic functions, but what seems increasingly likely, increased substantive political inputs into policy-making and implementation processes.

## Conclusions

Max Weber's thoughts on bureaucracy and his writings on rationality are useful analytical tools because they were based on beliefs, namely, as Bendix, (1965:19) mentions, '... the belief in rational regulations, the sanctity of tradition, of the gift of grace possessed by a person.' Each system remains valid only within limits and when these limits are ignored or exceeded, the type of

authority changes its form. Weber (1968:262) himself acknowledges, ‘... that “ruling organizations” which belong only to one or another of these pure types are very exceptional.’ There can be a combination of authority types for Weber. Rational legal authority can very easily have traditional and charismatic elements within the construction. For Weber, the most important consideration, especially with regard to the central state, was that substantive rationality challenged formal rationality in relation to policy-making.

Weber himself feared the influence, authority and advance of a modern rational bureaucracy. Weber (1968) was aware that bureaucrats were capable of ‘institutional’ charisma and he sought ways in which to counter this problem. He particularly believed that formal bureaucratic rationality should, at the very least, be challenged by more economic and politically biased substantive rationality. While acknowledging the importance of bureaucratic functions within the state, Weber’s writings offer us potential solutions to the problem of excessive civil servant authority and influence in the policy-making process. The parliamentary committee, with political representation, is suggested by Weber as a means for politicians to exert more authority with regard to policy-making. Indeed, Weber uses the British Parliamentary system as an example of state machinery that uses the select committee within the policy-making process, thus guaranteeing substantive, political inputs.

By using Weber’s bureaucratic theories within an educational context, I would suggest the following assumptions: firstly, civil servants within education policy-making are influenced by formal bureaucratic rationality which means they can have more say on policy-making processes than their administrative position within the state would suggest. This consists of educational civil servants technical and specialised knowledge which would give bureaucrats a varying degree of input into the education policy-making process; secondly, a more forceful, coherent political agenda based on substantive rationality concerning policy formation and development could theoretically witness a decline in the ‘rational’ role of the civil servant within the education policy-making process. Thus, by examining Weber’s ideas and using the substantive and formal type constructs, politicians would have to assert their substantive ideas within the central state and use the Parliamentary Select Committee as a state mechanism and means to control formal rational bureaucratic inputs into the policy-making process.

Political initiative stems from the top and therefore the character of the political leader, the leading group, or the politicians that shape policy in departments of state, or political interest groups was/is essential. The focus in this article has been on Weber’s theories, which I believe, have more applicability and resonance to the context of the relationship under examination. Marxist theories can be critiqued as Offe (1996) in particular believed bureaucracy could not escape from its formal, functional rationality within the state and could not respond to substantive, political policy objectives. Offe (1996) argues

that political power is determined by formal rules, which protects bourgeois interests. I tend to agree with Held and Krieger (1994) when they argue that bureaucracy can be an effective agent of political policy concerning the central state. Weber (1968, 1992) demands that politicians reassert their role as policy-makers within the central state. The political function within the state, as Beetham (1985, 1996) argues, should be slightly more than the broadest formation of policy and rules. For the central state relationship under examination to change, educational politicians are required, through substantive rationality, to influence policy-making within education. Weber argued that formal, rational legal authority was too strong within the state, meaning bureaucratic authority had too great an influence on policy-making. He believed it was up to politicians to change the nature of the central state relationship through substantive rationality and at the very least challenge the formal, technical knowledge that had accumulated in departments caused by modern, permanent bureaucratic functions. Weber's theories of bureaucracy is the most convincing way of increasing understanding of the conditions needed for the beginnings of a theoretical movement of role and influence within the state relationship between education civil servants toward education politicians. The evidence presented suggests contemporary parliamentary democracy can see a visible reversal in this movement with substantive, political influence superseding bureaucratic inputs into the policy-process. A clear example of this concerns the resignation of Estelle Morris in October 2002, who herself suggested she was not good enough at strategic management within the DfES, nor was she capable of dealing with the modern media.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> For early media analysis of Estelle Morris's resignation from the DfES see: Wintour, P. Watt, N. (2002) 'Morris Quits: I've not done as well as I should have' *The Guardian*, October 24, 1; Macintyre, D. (2002) 'Devoted to education but not at ease in the limelight' *The Independent*, October 24, 5; Ahmed, K., Hinsliff, G., Bright, M. (2002) 'How Estelle learnt the toughest lesson of all' *The Observer*, October 27, 18-19.